



**WattsLine** from Repr. Ralph Watts

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email: [ralph.watts@legis.state.ia.us](mailto:ralph.watts@legis.state.ia.us)

website: [www.ralphwatts.com](http://www.ralphwatts.com)

(O) 281-7499 (H) Ph: 993-4850

**Occasional updates regarding legislative issues of constituent interest.**

## **IT'S THAT SEASON AGAIN**

With just a day left until the election I want to send a few thoughts to my friends. This has been a character challenging campaign so far. I haven't seen this kind of ugliness in my campaigns previously, but this year I have seen gutter level campaigning and below the belt tactics that I consider unconscionable. Some of the charges have been leveled by a teacher of our children. One has been made by a person who is in charge of the school, as a principal. I won't bore you with the nonsense they are dispensing, except to tell you they are both telling a big lie and they are grossly over-exaggerating the facts. If you're interested you can see it on my website at [www.ralphwatts.com](http://www.ralphwatts.com).

## **WHAT ARE THE REAL ISSUES?**

One of the reasons the rhetoric is so charged this year is that the majority of the House members did exactly what we told you we would do when we were sent to the legislature. We have tried to weather the storm with the downturn in state revenues by refusing to raise taxes. We have turned back amendment after amendment attempted by the minority party to increase spending. In the 2006 legislative session we turned away amendments totaling \$372 million which would have required raising the state sales tax by 1c and the personal income tax by 14%.

Educators say we haven't given them enough. That may be so but we always give them the first bite of the apple and that bite is getting bigger every year. The nonsensical rhetoric obscures reality. The reality is that all of us value a top-flight education system, one that will prepare our children and grandchildren for the future that they will face. Sincere, dedicated teachers are key to that system. The devil is in the details as to how we accomplish what we want. Some would have us believe that our problem lies in the fact that we are under funding education. When I look at my property tax bill I see 61% of those taxes go to our local K-12 system. At the state level, 40% of the total state budget goes to K-12 support, and 20% to the regents' university system.

The problem we are facing is that we need true leadership at the state level to make the necessary adjustments. Over the past decade we have seen a student decline in Iowa by over 20,000 students, we have 360+ school districts and our state population is almost stagnant. In fact we have the same population as we had in 1900. Our problem now is that the education dollar is not getting to the end of the row, i.e. into the classroom. Since our entire school funding is built around the number of students, the decline in students creates a classical organizational problem for all of us. As the student numbers continue to decline, the amount of overhead takes on more significance. Statewide, we can't afford to support the number of school buildings and the number of school employees outside the classroom without significant increases in taxes. We must get serious about a statewide reorganization. If we are successful in doing that, the funds we are now putting into the education system would enable us to get more funds to the teachers.

I'm fully aware that anyone who gets too close to this issue will be gun fodder for the teachers unions, however, a constructive reorganization is needed to adjust to the changing world that came about over the past twenty years. That leadership will not come from within the current education structure or from those beholden to it. It will only come from a visionary governor and a willing, forward-looking legislature. Keep that in mind when you cast your vote.